

Abbreviations Used in this Dissertation

BBI---The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: A Guide to Word
Combinations

CECD---Concise English-Chinese Dictionary 《简明英汉词典》

CECD---Collegiate English-Chinese Dictionary 《大学英汉多用词典》

CIDE---Cambridge International Dictionary of English

COBUILD---Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary

DEC---A Dictionary of English Collocations

LDOCE---Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

MECD---Multifunctional English-Chinese Dictionary

《英汉多功能词典》

NAECD---A New Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary

《最新高级英汉词典》

OALD---Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

BLD---Bilingual Learner's Dictionary

MLD---Monolingual Learner's Dictionary

Synopsis

The author, in this dissertation, gives an analysis of lexical collocations and explores the systematic treatments of lexical collocations in some of the present learner's dictionaries both monolingual and bilingual. This author puts forward in great detail nearly ten possible ways of treating lexical collocations in a learner's dictionary.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, excluding an introduction and a conclusion.

In the introduction, this author explains the purpose of the dissertation. English, like other natural languages, exhibits a "clustering tendency" called collocation. Thus, learning collocations becomes a quality requisite to a foreign learner in the process of English learning. However, collocations constitute to learners a seemingly formidable obstacle. Learner's dictionaries, helpers for foreign learners, are duty-bound to provide collocational information. In fact, EFL lexicographers have done something of satisfactory work on grammatical collocations, but as for lexical collocations, there is much untouched or undone. It is therefore of great necessity to seek for their systematic treatments.

Chapter One reveals the indispensable relationship between lexical collocations and the necessity of their inclusion in a learner's dictionary. Lexical collocations are one part of the fundamental elements in lexical learning and help to discriminate polysemys, so they are very crucial in the language acquisition. Also, the steady increase in learner's productive need contributes to the importance of lexical collocations. The necessity of their inclusion in a learner's dictionary results from the nature of a learner's dictionary, the reference needs and difficulties of foreign learners. In order to understand lexical collocations well, this chapter begins with the definitions of collocation and lexical collocation. Classification of lexical collocations is also introduced. According to different criteria, lexical collocations can fall into three categories: 1) motivated and non-motivated 2) established and potential 3) restricted and open.

Chapter Two elaborates the features of lexical collocations. Lexical collocations, this author believes, have four main characteristics: 1) mutual expectancy of collocators; 2) restricted collocability; 3) allowing transformation to some degree; 4) arbitrariness and inexplicability. Comparisons and contrasts are also made in this part between lexical collocations and related concepts such as idioms, multiword lexical units, compounds and so on, and between Chinese and English lexical collocations so as to deepen the understanding of lexical collocations.

Chapter Three makes an investigation of the methods and techniques of treating lexical collocations adopted by several monolingual and bilingual learner's

dictionaries. This author picks up the “Big Four” as examples for MLDs and chooses CECD (Concise), CECD (Collegiate) and MECD as illustrations for BLDs. In contrast to the detailed and various ways of treating lexical collocations in MLDs, one can not but regret that the treatments in BLDs have left much to be desired.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five deal with the systematic treatments of the inclusion of lexical collocations in a learner’s dictionary based on the investigation of actual treatments discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four includes methods of collecting material, several selecting principles, some selecting criteria and arrangement for lexical collocations. In collecting material, there are generally four main sources open to EFL lexicographers: 1) general collocational dictionaries 2) lexicographers’ linguistic competence 3) lexical occurrences met in reading and listening 4) corpus. When selecting lexical collocations, the lexicographer should follow the principles like authenticity, representativeness and acceptability; and include those lexical collocations for common words and polysemys; and those up-to-date and error-inviting lexical collocations. Last, according to the types of lexical collocations, the EFL lexicographer may put them within noun entries, verb entries and adjective entries respectively.

Chapter Five puts forward nearly ten possible specific ways of giving lexical collocation information in a learner’s dictionary. Apart from the traditional methods of including lexical collocations in examples and definitions, and showing in boldface within entries, they can also be indicated in a separate sense, usage notes, language notes, illustrations, a separate paragraph and Chinese equivalents. In addition, the lexicographer can adopt a warning sign to show their lexical collocability as well.

In the conclusion, a summary of this dissertation is given. This author concludes this dissertation by stating her sincere hope that her efforts will make some contributions to the production of EFL dictionaries in a more satisfactory way in terms of lexical collocations and that the EFL lexicography will march towards perfection in the future.

Key Words: Lexical Collocations

Learner’s Dictionaries

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One Lexical collocations and Learner's Dictionaries.....	3
1.1 Collocation.....	3
1.2 Lexical Collocation.....	3
1.2.1 Definition of Lexical Collocation.....	4
1.2.2 Classification of Lexical Collocations.....	4
1.2.2.1 Motivated and Nonmotivated Lexical Collocations.....	4
1.2.2.2 Established and Potential Lexical Collocations.....	5
1.2.2.3 Restricted and Open Lexical Collocations.....	5
1.3 Indispensable Relationship between Lexical Collocations and Learner's	
Dictionaries.....	10
1.3.1 Importance of Lexical Collocations.....	10
1.3.2 Necessity of Lexical Collocations in Learner's Dictionaries.....	11
1.3.2.1 Different Reference Needs between Native Speakers and Foreign	
Learners.....	11
1.3.2.2 Nature of Learner's Dictionaries.....	12
1.3.2.3 Difficulties of Foreign Learners.....	12
1.4 Conclusion.....	13
Chapter Two Analysis of Lexical Collocations.....	14
2.1 Features of Lexical Collocations.....	14
2.1.1 Mutual Expectancy of Collocators.....	14
2.1.2 Restricted Collocability.....	14
2.1.3 Allowing Transformation to Some Degree.....	15
2.1.4 Arbitrariness and Inexplicability.....	16
2.2 Contrasts between Lexical Collocations and Some Related	17
Concepts.....	18
2.2.1 Lexical Collocations and Idioms.....	20
2.2.2 Lexical Collocations and Multiword Lexical Units.....	20
2.2.3 Lexical Collocations and Compounds.....	20
2.3 Comparison and Contrast between English and Chinese Lexical Collocations	21
2.3.1 Complete Equivalent.....	
2.3.2 False Equivalent.....	
2.4 Conclusion.....	22
	22
Chapter Three Actual Treatments of Lexical Collocations in the Present	22
Monolingual and Bilingual Learner's Dictionaries.....	25
	29
	31

3.1 Treatments of Lexical Collocations in

MLDS.....

3.1.1 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.....	33
3.1.2 Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.....	34
3.1.3 Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary.....	36
3.1.4 Cambridge International Dictionary of English.....	39

3.2 Treatments of Lexical Collocations in BLDS..... 40

3.2.1 Concise English - Chinese Dictionary.....	40
3.2.2 Collegiate English - Chinese Dictionary.....	42
3.2.3 Multifunctional English - Chinese Dictionary.....	42

3.3 Conclusion..... 42

Chapter Four Guiding Principles for the Treatments of Lexical Collocations in Learner's Dictionaries..... 42

4.1 Collecting Lexical Collocation Materials..... 43

4.2 Principles for Selecting Lexical Collocations..... 43

4.2.1 Authenticity.....	44
4.2.2 Representativeness.....	45
4.2.3 Acceptability.....	45
4.2.4 Coverage.....	46

4.3 Selecting Criteria..... 47

4.3.1 Restricted Lexical Collocations.....	
4.3.2 Lexical Collocations of Common Words.....	48
4.3.3 Lexical Collocations of Polysemous Words.....	48
4.3.4 Up-to-date Lexical Collocations.....	48
4.3.5 Error-Inviting Lexical Collocations of Chinese Learners.....	48

4.4 Arrangement of Lexical Collocations..... 49

4.5 Conclusion..... 50

Chapter Five Systematic Treatments of Lexical Collocations in Learner's Dictionaries..... 51

5.1 General Treatment..... 55

5.2 Specific Treatments..... 57

5.2.1 Listing Typical Lexical Collocations as a Separate Sense.....	59
5.2.2 Showing Typical Lexical Collocations in Boldface within Entries.....	59
5.2.3 Collocators Embodied in Definitions.....	60
5.2.4 Collocators in Invented or Quoted Examples.....	61
5.2.5 Usage Notes	62

5.2.6	<i>Language Notes</i>	
5.2.7	<i>Pictorial Illustrations</i>	
5.2.8	<i>Warning Signs Showing Restricted Collocability</i>	
5.2.9	<i>Listing Collocations in a Separate Paragraph</i>	
5.2.10	<i>Showing Collocators in Chinese Equivalents</i>	
5.3	Conclusion	
	Conclusion	
	Bibliography	

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Introduction

It is universally true that any natural language, old or new, does have a “clustering tendency” to some degree - individual words tend to combine frequently with other rather than appear single both in speech and writing. This linguistic phenomenon was well noticed by Kjellmer, the chief editor of **A Dictionary of English Collocations** (DEC). He said, “There is no doubt that natural language has a certain block-like character. Words tend to occur in the same clusters again and again.” (Kjellmer, 1994: ix) This kind of natural and frequent co-occurrence of individual words is termed as collocation.

Co-occurrence tendency was first utilized in literature in the 1940s. But it was not discussed by linguists until 1957 when J.R. Firth put forward the term “collocation” and showed his familiar example “ass”, which occurred with a limited set of adjectives such as silly, obstinate, stupid, awful and egregious (occasionally) (陆国强, 1983: 339). And not until the recent 10 years did lexicographers pay attention to collocations and give them a systematic treatment.

The concept “collocation” has been treated by different linguists and lexicographers with somewhat varying definitions. Various as they may be, there is a fairly general agreement that collocation refers to the habitual and natural co-occurrence of words.

The accurate use of collocation is very crucial to both native and non-native users in their language learning. However, to a non-native user, for example, a Chinese English learner, collocation information is of greater importance than to a native one mainly due to their learning differences. Native speakers of English do have experience of their own language since they read and speak it effortlessly for hours every day even though they may not be conscious of; while to foreign learners, the awareness of collocations, however, has to be fostered in a classroom. Also, they are bound to run into a risk of being influenced by their own culture and native language. For example, Chinese students tend to use collocations like “big rain”, “crowded traffic”, “much population” and “light smoke” to express the Chinese equivalents “大雨”, “拥挤的交通”, “人口多” and “轻烟”. Native speakers, nevertheless, can by instinct recognize the mistakes and know the correct ones should be “heavy rain”, “heavy traffic”, “large population” and “thin smoke” respectively.

Now that foreign learners are doomed to encounter obstacles when learning collocations, it's natural to say that EFL dictionaries, which are specially designed to cater for the needs of foreign learners, will and must include collocation information both grammatical and lexical. However, grammatical collocations and lexical collocations, being the equally important factor as grammatical ones in language learning, have generally been overlooked in most cases. “There is a tendency for human lexicographers to focus on the way words are used to describe the world rather

than the way words interrelate with one another.” (Tomaszcyk et al, 1990: 35)

However, to foreign learners’ satisfaction, EFL lexicographers have now been paying close attention to the treatment of grammatical collocations since A.S. Hornby, probably the most influential figure in EFL lexicography, developed grammatical patterns in the first edition of OALD. And what was started by Hornby has now been further developed by the Longman team of lexicographers and other compilers of EFL dictionaries. True, the treatment of grammatical collocations in learner’s dictionaries deserves full praise for the inclusion of detailed and explicit information about them.

However, a true recording of collocations, “the way words interrelate with one another” cannot stop at grammatical ones. Lexical collocations which consist of two equal elements of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, have every reason to claim to receive equal attention and treatment as grammatical ones.

A learner’s dictionary has the very necessity to cover lexical collocations. The inclusion of lexical collocations, however, is not so easy as one might think. Due to the fact that they contain larger quantity in actual use in contrast to grammatical ones, it is more difficult to describe them adequately and systematically, and above all, hard to generalize their rules. However, there is no shrinking responsibility for a learner’s dictionary to offer information about lexical collocations. Several questions then may arise with this responsibility: What kind of lexical collocations can enter a learner’s dictionary? How can lexical collocations be best presented in a learner’s dictionary? How can lexicographers do to meet the learner’s productive need as much as possible? These are questions which have no quick answers.

With the questions in mind, this author aims at analyzing the characteristics of lexical collocations and giving a detailed account of the systematical treatments in learner’s dictionaries. The following is a general introduction to which this dissertation will discuss.

Chapter One introduces the definition and classification of lexical collocations and explores the indispensable relationship between collocations and learner’s dictionaries, focusing on the importance and necessity of their inclusion. In Chapter Two an analysis of lexical collocations is attempted on their features. Contrasts are also made in this part between lexical collocations and some other concepts like idioms, multiword lexical units, etc. Chapter Three investigates the actual treatments of lexical collocations in the present monolingual and bilingual learner’s dictionaries. In light of those actual treatments, Chapter Four and Chapter Five respectively deal with the guiding principles and some specific ways of systematically treating lexical collocations in learner’s dictionaries. The last part concludes the paper by pointing out adequate and scientific treatment of lexical collocations in learner’s dictionaries will undoubtedly help EFL lexicography march towards perfection.

Chapter One Lexical Collocations and Learner's Dictionaries

Mastering English collocations is one of the key factors for a foreign learner in the development of lexical competence. Learner's dictionaries, the learning aid for foreign learners, should and have to provide such information. In fact, learner's dictionaries have for many years devoted great efforts to grammatical ones and represented them with increasing precision. Lexical collocations, unfortunately, have been neglected. This chapter thus attempts to explore the indispensable relationship between lexical collocations and learner's dictionaries to reveal the importance and necessity of including lexical collocation information in a learner's dictionary. It will start with the explanations of the two concepts "collocation" and "lexical collocation".

1.1 Collocation

What is a collocation? Many linguists and lexicographers have touched this question and been trying to give it a satisfactory definition from their own point of view.

In the linguistic field, F. De Saussure, one of the modern linguistic founders, believed there exists a vertical relationship called "paradigmatic relation" and the linear or horizontal relationship termed as "Syntagmatic relation" between the linguistic elements in a language system. Collocation thus can be regarded as "the permitted syntagmatic combination of words". (陆国强, 1983: 339)

Bo. Svensén said "A collocation maybe defined as a group of words with a certain meaning which tend to occur together. A word with a certain meaning which occurs in a collocation along with a given word will be called a collocator of that word." (Svensén, 1993: 99)

To use the words of Anthony P. Cowie, "by collocation is meant the co-occurrence of two or more lexical items as realizations of structural elements within a given syntactic pattern." (Cowie, 1978: 132)

Morton Benson, one of the chief editors of the BBI dictionary, pointed out "By collocation we mean a group of words that occurs repeatedly, ie. recurs in a language." (Benson, 1985: 61)

In Goran Kjellmer's view, collocation is "such recurring sequences of items as are grammatically well formed". (Kjellmer, 1994: xiv)

From the above definitions proposed by different scholars depending on their varying theoretical standpoints, we can conclude that collocation is not a concept which is possible to define in a way that is both all-round and applicable to all societies. On the other hand, there is a common core of collocation on which most scholars agree: recurrence or co-occurrence of words. In light of this realization, we conclude that

collocation refers to the habitually co-occurrent combination of individual words.

1.2 Lexical Collocation

1.2.1 Definition of Lexical Collocation

On the basis of the structure and the nature of collocations, collocations are divided into grammatical and lexical collocations.

“Lexical collocations in contrast to grammatical collocations, contain no subordinate element: they usually consist of two ‘equal’ lexical components.”(Benson, 1985: 61-62)

The same view is specifically expressed in the introduction of the BBI dictionary like this:

Lexical collocations, in contrast to grammatical collocations, normally do not contain prepositions, infinitives or clauses. Typical lexical collocations consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. (Benson et al, 1986: xxiii - xxiv)

Bo. Svensén also gave an account of lexical collocations by stating lexical collocations “usually consist of words having approximately equal status”. (Svensén, 1993: 101)

It can be thus concluded that a lexical collocation is a recurrent combination of words, consisting of equal lexical elements of adjectives, verbs, nouns and adverbs.

1.2.2 Classification of Lexical Collocations

Lexical collocations can be classified according to different criteria.

1.2.2.1 Motivated and Nonmotivated Lexical Collocations

In lexicology, association and collocation are often co-mentioned. Based on the association between name and sense - motivation, lexical collocations fall into two types: motivated and nonmotivated.

Motivated lexical collocations are those with strong motivation. They occupy the majority in any natural language. In light of onomatopoeic motivation, for instance, there are lexical collocations like: *snake hiss*, *pig squeal (grunt)*, *larks warble*, *bears growl*, *horses neigh (snort)*, *cats mew (purr)* and so on. Built on semantic motivation, typical motivated lexical collocations include *a sea of troubles*, *a shower of stones*, *a rain of bullets*, *blooming health*, *piercing cry*, and *bitter irony*.

Nonmotivated lexical collocations, on the other hand, refer to those whose motivation is relatively weak. They are sometimes named conventional lexical collocations because the collocability seems arbitrary and conventional. For example, the Chinese word “群” can be translated diversely when collocating with different animals: *a herd of elephants, a pride of lions, a school of fish, a swarm of ants, a flock of sheep*, etc. The above lexical collocations are of little motivation. Kjellmer provides us with a good example to illustrate the nonmotivation of some lexical collocations “We **make** the bed but **lay** the table, we **clean** our teeth but **wash** our hands, we **hope for** something but **dream of** it.” (Kjellmer, 1994: xix)

1.2.2.2 Established and Potential Lexical Collocations

According to the degree of co-occurrence, lexical collocations can be divided into established and potential ones.

The former refers to the familiar occurrences which are firmly established in use. Their structures are generally fixed or set and stable as well. People will find, among this kind of lexical collocations, *bacon and eggs, cup and saucer*, and *settle the bill*; but not *bacon and egg, saucer and cup*, and *settle the account*. Just as Ronald Mackin said “collocations of this type can be so well established in the experience of the native speaker that, given one element, he is able to predict the other.” (Cowie, 1978: 134)

The latter is also called occasional or transient collocations. They include unstable or occasional co-occurrences by means of coinage, nonce words, parody and wrong analogy, etc. They may not be as immediately identifiable as established lexical collocations, but they are “none the less perfectly intelligible in terms of the compatibility of the meanings of their parts.” (Cowie, 1978: 135) Examples of this type are *liver and mash*, which is a parody of *sausage and mash*, and *coley and chips*, which is a imitation of *fish and chips*. Because of their unstable quality as well as characteristic of temporary combinations, potential collocations are of little possibility to be accepted and used commonly or permanently.

1.2.2.3 Restricted and Open Lexical Collocations

In respect of collocability and substitutability, lexical collocations include open and restricted ones.

Restricted lexical collocations are frequent combinations of two or more words used in one of their regular and non-idiomatic meanings, following certain structural patterns and restricted in their commutability in semantic valency. The elements of a restricted lexical collocation are uniquely bound to one another and allow limited collocability, in the sense that few of them can be replaced without a change of meaning.

Open lexical collocations, on the contrary, can occur with an almost endless range of lexical items and freely allow substitutions. The elements in an open lexical collocation have a potentiality to combine with others and the collocability is relatively open-ended. This is why they are so called.

The word "invite" can give us a good clarification about the differences between these two types. When it means "to ask someone to come", we can generate open lexical collocations like *invite relatives/ a foreign friend/ my teacher/ the minister* and the like. But in the sense of "to encourage", "invite" can only be followed by a set of restricted co-occurring words such as *danger, criticism, comments, scandal* and *crime*. Take "explode" for further illustration. In the concrete meaning of "to blow up", the items with which can acceptably occur are almost open-ended, such as *a building/ a bridge/ a hotel/ an embassy* and so on. In the specialized sense of "to prove to be wrong or mistaken", however, it can only combine with a relatively restricted set of nouns somewhat related in meaning: *belief, claim, theory, fallacy, case* and *myth*, etc.

It is in the restricted lexical collocations that learners meet the most difficult obstacle. They certainly should be the center of attention. In order to get a better insight into them, let's first discuss their scopes. There are six basic diversions of restricted lexical collocations based on the classification of Morton Benson and his colleagues.

A. Noun + Verb

This kind of lexical collocations contains a noun and verb which "names an action characteristic of the person or thing designated by the noun." (Benson et al, 1986: xxvii). Lexical collocations like "fire crackles", "lightening flashes" and "lion roars" are typical instances of this type.

In many cases, the verb following the noun is restricted to the very single one. Therefore, most of the lexical collocations created on the basis of onomatopoeic motivation, as a general rule, are grouped into this diversion. "Hens cluck", "wolves howl" and "apes gibber" all belong to this kind.

Yet under some circumstances, the collocators of a verb can be alternative. For example, "blood" can collocate with *circulates, flows, runs, clots*, etc.; "geese" may combine with either *cackle* or *gabble*; "alarms" can occur with *go off, ring* and *sound*. Usually this sort is unpredictable and thus extremely difficult for a foreign learner. There are, however, some cases when the verb is inferential such as *singers sing, beggars beg, drivers drive, teachers teach* and *cooks cook*. These expectable noun + verb lexical collocations are often not allowed to enter the realm of a learner's dictionary.

B. Adjective + Noun

This division is made up of an adjective and a noun. Examples of such kind are “loose behaviour”, “heavy drinker”, “hard evidence”, “a faint hope”, “dry facts” and “slow season”. In most cases, a number of adjectives, though mostly limited and restricted, can modify the same noun. In the case of “smile”, its collocators can be “blank”, “broad”, “cordial”, “forced”, “complacent”, “artful”, etc.

Interestingly, sometimes both of the positive and superlative forms of an adjective can combine with the same noun. For example, “warm regards” and “warmest regards”; “good wishes” and “best wishes”; “hearty welcome” and “heartiest welcome” are both acceptable in English. However, it is argued that, more often, the positive and superlative forms of an adjective cannot appear with the same noun. For instance, an Englishman may say “fondest wishes” and “dearest wishes”, but they think it unnatural to use “fond wishes” and “dear wishes”.

Last but not least, there are many cases when a noun functions as an adjective to modify a noun. The pattern noun + noun, therefore, can be grouped into this type in practice. Some good examples of this sort are “paper tiger”, “house arrest”, “window display”, “human dignity”, “salon concert”, “prize competition”, “time sheet”, “seed grain”, etc.

C. Verb + Noun

In light of the different functions of the verb, the verb + noun lexical collocation pattern can be subdivided into two categories: CA and EN collocations. These two categories are of special importance to the lexicographic description of English. They should receive detailed treatments in a learner’s dictionary. The following attempts to give them a clear description.

i) CA collocations

“These collocations consist of a verb denoting creation and/or activation.” (Benson, 1993: 64) CA collocations with a verb denoting creation usually indicate that the thing denoted by the noun is caused to occur or exist by performing the action. Some examples are “raise suspicion”, “inflict casualties”, “cultivate a taste”, “exert pressure”, “make out a check”, “invite criticism” and “provoke a riot”. The CA lexical collocations with a verb denoting activation often show that something denoted by the noun is made to start working by the action denoted by the verb. To put it in a more simple way, the verb in this kind of CA collocations can express the concept of “activation”. Here are some examples “light a candle”, “float securities”, “snap scene”, “play a flute”, “answer a call”, “hold a meeting”; “carry an election”, “spread a rumour” and “push a button”.

In some instances, the same noun collocates with different verbs will denote

alternative functions, that is, with one verb to denote “creation” while with another verb to denote “activation”. Here are some typical examples borrowed from Morton Benson: “establish a principle”, “draw up a will” and “pronounce/pass a sentence” indicate “creation” while “apply a principle”, “execute a will” and “carry out a sentence” show “activation”.

In more circumstances, nevertheless, the same verb can express the meanings both “creation” and “activation”, as Benson pointed out “ the meanings creation and activation are united in one verb”. (Benson, 1993: 64) Such kind of cases are “utter an idea”, “advance a suggestion”, “commit a crime”, “perform an operation”, “issue an agreement”, “grant a scholarship”, and “erect a skyscraper”.

In many cases, more than one verb may appear with the same noun to form a CA collocation. One can say “go for a trip” or “make a trip”; and “make an error” or “commit an error”. What’s more, it is interesting to find out those words which combine with the same noun are often synonymous. Sometimes the verbs may, however, vary in the stylistic aspect. Take the word “crime” as an example. Both “commit” and “perpetrate”, which is a pair of synonyms, can occur with “crime”, but “perpetrate” is stylistically more formal than “commit”.

CA lexical collocations are rather arbitrary. Even for native speakers, there are times when they have to consult a dictionary to make sure whether the collocators are appropriate or not, let alone a foreign learner. The arbitrary characteristic of CA collocations are demonstrated in two aspects:

One is that the collocators are often unpredictable. In English one can say “make a mistake”, but not “commit a mistake”. The collocations “do graduate work” and “make an estimate” are used frequently, but “do graduate studies” and “make an estimation” are unacceptable. One says “hold a funeral”, but not “hold a burial”. Non-native speakers are always confused by the arbitrary conventions and have no way to predicate these collocators.

The other lies in the differences between American CA collocations and British ones. A native American speaker may use “take up a collection” but an Englishman has to say “have a whipround” (a BE synonym of collection). Englishmen prefer to “have a bath” but Americans invariably “take a bath.”

Last, it should be noted that predictable free CA combinations must not be considered as CA collocations even if, strictly speaking, the verb in a free CA combination displays the function of “creation” or “activation”. The compilers of a learner’s dictionary thus need not include such combinations as “build a house”, “plant tomatoes,” “water vegetables”, “make tables”, “write a composition” and “cause an accident”.

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